

How Many Albanian Cases? An Exercise in Syntactic Morphology

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1. How many nominal cases are there in modern Albanian? The information presented by grammars of Albanian, referring to the simple forms of the noun words, is that there are five cases, e.g., for *gur* (m.) ‘stone’ (following Boissin 1975:84).

	Singular noun	
	Indefinite	Definite
Nominative	<i>një¹ gur</i> ‘a stone’	<i>guri</i> ‘the stone’
Vocative		
Accusative	<i>një gur</i>	<i>gurin</i>
Genitive	<i>(i) një guri</i>	<i>(i) guri</i>
Dative	<i>një guri</i>	<i>gurit</i>
Ablative	<i>(prej)² një guri</i>	<i>(prej) guri</i>
	Plural	
	Indefinite	Definite
Nominative	<i>ca¹ gurë</i>	<i>gurët</i>
Vocative		
Accusative		
Genitive	<i>(i) ca gurëve</i>	<i>(i) gurëve³</i>
Dative	<i>ca gurëve</i>	<i>gurëve³</i>
Ablative	<i>(prej)² ca gurësh</i> or <i>(prej) ca gurëve</i>	<i>(prej) gurëve³</i> <i>(prej) gurëve</i>

Table 1. Declension of the indefinite and definite noun (masculine).

¹ *Një* is the indefinite article ‘a, one’; *ca* or *disa* is its plural. They are frequent, but not obligatory.

² *Prej* is a preposition meaning ‘from, of’ and governing the ablative. Like some other grammars, Boissin would have us believe that *prej* with the ablative might be in free variation with the ablative itself, ‘a better marked ablative’, as it were. Yet this suggestion is not borne out by the facts (if it were, it would have been in the line of this paper, which deals with how to distinguish among identical case forms.)

³ The ending *-vet* for the plural definite oblique cases (as against *-ve*) is considered old-fashioned by Kostallari et al., 1976. Indeed, a reading of Kadare (1967), the text used here, did not reveal a single *-vet* ending, just *-ve* for both the definite and indefinite ablative, dative and genitive.

This is the morphological situation for the masculine noun (the feminine declension is similar in structure). For the singular indefinite noun there are clearly only two distinct case forms: nom.-acc. *gur* and gen.-dat.-abl. *guri*. Why then does Boissin posit five cases?

The plural paradigm does seem richer, showing three distinct indefinite forms: nom.-acc. *gurë*, gen.-dat. *gurëve*, abl. *gurësh* (or *gurëve*; in some forms of Albanian, *gurësh* has been replaced by *gurëve* and the authorities tend to encourage that simplification⁴ — which would again make only two forms in the plural).

Even counting *gurësh* as a third form, three plural cases is still not the alleged five. Moreover, the existence of the unequivocal ablative form *gurësh* in the plural indefinite in no way helps the hearer or reader of Albanian to diagnose correctly the singular cases.⁵ Such a hearer, confronted with the sgl. “ablative” *guri*, cannot tell the difference from “genitive” *guri* or “dative” *guri*.

Now, if indeed there formally exist only two, at most three, case forms, how is it that all the grammars (see References) present such redundant, identical forms as distinct cases? Is it some unscientific, anachronistic, perhaps Latin-based paradigm? And should we perpetuate such inadequate morphological analysis?

Yet the existing grammars are not so badly mistaken: there is a sound basis for the traditional five-case division; somewhere in Albanian speech or writing there lurks the information enabling us to distinguish between the morphologically identical cases. The grammars have been mistaken only in presenting Albanian cases as a distinction between forms of words, i.e., within morphology. As I shall prove, the valid differentiation between the three indefinite *guri*, or between the three definite *gurit* etc., rests in reality on syntactic grounds.⁶

2. One such syntactic detail is in fact traditionally recognized, but possibly has not been given its full theoretical significance. In the paradigm above, Boissin has the genitive forms preceded by (*i*). That *i* represents a rather complex syntactic phenomenon, well known and explained by the grammars, and called by Boissin (1975: 88 et passim) *article de connexion*, and by others *connecting particle* (Mann 1932:55) or *particle of concord* (Newmark 1955: 94 etc.). The native term is *nyje e përparme* ‘preceding ar-

⁴ *Gurëve* instead of *gurësh* seems to be current. It is the form taught in more recent school grammars, e.g., Radovicka et al. (1975:167, 191) and Dhrimo et al. (1976:89). See also §5.2. For *gurëve* instead of *gurëvet* see fn. 3.

⁵ For the linguist’s obligation to give preference to the hearer, see Barri 1977:19.

⁶ For a critique of the Bloomfieldian ‘distinction of levels’ see Barri, 1975b:5–7 and 1977:17.

ticle, joint' (Demiraj 1970:64) or *nyjë* 'joint, article' (Kostallari et al. 1976:90). For the sake of completeness I shall briefly describe here this typical Albanian phenomenon, naming it concord pronoun.

2.1 The genitive case appears in Albanian in adnominal, possessive constructions. For example, indefinite *një gur i një mali* 'a stone of a mountain', definite *guri i malit* 'the stone of the mountain'. In the latter, *i* is the nominative singular masculine form of the concord pronoun, providing the immediately following genitive *malit* 'of the stone' with a sort of 'concord' to the preceding nominative singular masculine *guri* 'the mountain'. In other words, *i* shows that *malit* modifies *guri*, that they belong together in the same phrase. (The same concord pronoun *i* is used to provide a following adjective with concord to its noun.) Some grammars write *i* or *e* before the genitive form, *e* being the feminine nominative singular of the same concord pronoun (e.g., *vajza e malit* 'the girl of the mountain'), to hint that the pronoun has a complete declension, always repeating the gender-number-case categories of the nucleus noun. (For example, when that nucleus is in the ablative, e.g., *gurit* 'from the stone', the pronoun will be *të*: *gurit të malit* 'from the stone of the mountain'.)

In conclusion then: the genitive case is distinct from other oblique cases not by its morphology but by its syntactic concord pronoun.

3. Now for the dative case. Let us again introduce the question: How can a hearer or a reader of Albanian diagnose a form such as *gurit* as dative, distinguished from genitive or ablative? There is no morphological index for that; but there are two syntactic signals. First, unlike the genitive, this case in Albanian is almost exclusively **adverbal**; i.e., is part of the finite verb phrase (for a possible exception see below, 3.1). Thus, the hearer or reader may generally assume that any adverbial *gurit*, *gurëve* should be understood as a dative. Yet adverbial position is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the dative, as there is an adverbial ablative too. There must then be some additional signal, otherwise dative and ablative would fall mostly together. That signal is the following:

An adverbial noun in the dative, e.g., *gurit*, never figures alone in this function. It is always aided by a preceding or following **apposition** (or **extraposition**) of a dative **proclitic personal pronoun** in the third person—the real, unambiguous signal of the case. This pronoun has the form *i* in the singular (third person, both genders; not to be confused with the nominative concord particle preceding the genitive!) and *u* in the plural (third person, both genders). Thus *i ... gurit* means 'to the stone', *u ... maleve* 'to the mountains'.⁷

⁷ Incidentally, full personal pronouns in the dative have the same proclitic apposition,

Some examples: *Gjenerali i tregoi prifti kishën*. Literally: 'The General showed to him, to the priest, the church' (from Kadare, 1967: 10, line 8);

Ai do t' u çonte nënave eshtrat e bijve të tyre, 'He was going to bring to them, to the mothers, the bones of their sons' (line 35);

I kërkoi një cigare shoku 'he asked him, his friend, for a cigarette' (17, line 37; 'ask' in Albanian takes the dative);

Neve na janë lutur personalisht për shumë ushtarë 'Us, they have asked us about many soldiers' (27, line 4; *neve* is a full personal pronoun).

3.1 There is one environment where the oblique object has no apposed proclitic pronoun, yet seems best understood as a dative: when the governing word is not a finite verbal form, but a participle:

Ka një thirrje të komandës partizane drejtuar gjithë popullit shqipta . . . 'There is a call by the Command of the Partisans directed to all the Albanian people . . .' (Kadare, 1967:114, line 32);

shikimi i zjarrtë hedhur një femre 'the fiery look thrown at a woman' (127, line 8).

I have also found an expression, apparently frozen, where the dative complements a (verbal?) noun: *lavdi Zotit* 'a praise to God' (Kadare, 1967:178, line 23). Despite the "dative" translation, this is an instance of no distinction between genitive, dative and ablative. There is no way to tell the case formally. For *lavdi Zotit* cf. the Modern Greek parallel *δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ*, where dative and genitive have long fallen together.⁸

3.2 How is it that the two essential dative signals—adverbality and proclitic pronoun apposition—have long been ignored by grammarians, even if it is clear that hearers and readers of Albanian must make use of them constantly? The answer must be that the problem of case differentiation has never been connected with the information gathered about Albanian syntax, in this case about the proclitic pronouns. Among other mistakes, most writers treat together the proclitic pronouns of both dative and accusative. Thus, the fact that the short pronoun of the dative is obligatory, while that of the accusative is not, has mostly been overlooked.

For example, Mann (1932: 80) sees proclitic pronouns as "redundant", which for him means that—with some exceptions—"must precede all verbs governing a direct or indirect object which is in the definite . . . form" and that thus they add somehow to the presence of the definite article. His examples contain accusatives only, and the whole view is

in the form of their respective proclitic pronouns.

⁸ [In ancient Greek this calls for the dative: *δόξα . . . θεῷ* (Luke 2:14). *Ed.*]

inadequate, as I tried to show elsewhere (Barri 1975a:188ff.).

Newmark (1955) presents an interesting structural maneuver: he groups all cases outside the nominative and accusative under **marginal case** (5-6), then (84f.) he differentiates within the "marginal": the genitive by its concord particle, the dative by its indirect object function⁹; then the ablative by its adnominal function without a concord particle (but that does not answer for the adverbial ablative). In short, Newmark makes the same division as the other grammars. In a later article (1962) he was concerned with an even more elegant representation of the case system, but did not add to our knowledge of how to distinguish among cases.

Camaj's grammar of Geg¹⁰ (1969:40f.) does not go beyond mentioning the "Wiederholung" (repetition) of accusative and dative objects through "enclitics",¹¹ possibly for the sake of emphasis. His more recent *Grammar* (1984:94) presents a similar formulation.

Demiraj (1970) poses no questions either about the form of the oblique cases or about the apposition of proclitic pronouns. The same goes for Kostallari et al. (1976). Domi's *Syntax* (1970, formally a second volume to Demiraj's morphology (1970:24ff.)), speaks of "frequent repetitions" (what I call appositions) with both accusative and dative objects, but he provides very little detail.

A more accurate, documented approach is that of Buchholz (1968:717), whose good knowledge of the facts of the "obligatorische Reduplizierung" of the dative noun by the proclitic form (p. 717) I have mentioned elsewhere (Barri 1975a: 180f., 195). To my knowledge, she was the first to see that there was no dative noun without a "reduplizierend" pronoun, whereas accusative nouns were free to appear alone.

Dhrimo et al. (1976:190f.) also have a fairly good understanding of the regularity of the **repetition** (= **apposition**) of direct and indirect objects by means of the short pronouns. But they too, unfortunately, do not link the "syntactic" facts of their repetition or **reduplication** with the "morphological" problem of differentiating the oblique cases; they treat the genitive, ablative and dative as distinct in themselves.

⁹ But Newmark's *Outline* has no syntactic part in which to note the regular apposition between the proclitic pronoun and his "dative marginal".

¹⁰ Modern Albanian is roughly divided into the Tosk dialect (in the South) and the Geg dialect (in the North). The modern, regularized language is mainly based on the Tosk.

¹¹ "Enclitic pronouns" is right only in the general sense that these forms are short and unaccented. But *ἐγκλιτικόν* in Greek grammar means an unaccented word coming right after an accented one. I have therefore used proclitic, which refers more exactly to their normal position just before the verb of the sentence (not necessarily before the dative noun).

4. Let us look now into the ablative case. It has one distinct form, the plural indefinite, e.g., *gurësh* 'at, of, from stones'; Its other forms, sing. indef. *guri* and def. *gurit*, *gurëve(t)*, do not differ from those of the genitive or dative.¹² How then may these coinciding forms be distinguished from one another?

4.1 One environment of the ablative is as an adnominal complement, very much like the genitive. The formal difference is that the adnominal ablative is not introduced by the concord pronoun: *një gur mali* 'a mountain stone', *tym duhani* 'tobacco smoke' (Kadare 1967: 42, line 32); definite declension *guri malit* 'the mountain stone'; *kampionati futbollit* 'the football championship' (Kadare, 1967: 52, line 11). Semantically, as the translations show, the ablative provides a generic, non-specific description, contrasted with the concrete, specific genitive: *një gur i një mali* 'a stone of a (specific) mountain'; *guri i malit* 'the stone of the mountain'.

4.2 A second, rarer, environment of the ablative is as an adverbial complement with a separative or locative meaning: *Vështirësitë më të mëdha do të na dalin fshatarëve*. 'The biggest difficulties are going to come to us from the villagers' (1967: 21, line 16); *Gropat e hapura nxijnë anëve*. 'On the sides, the open ditches look black.' (55, line 2).

As to how a hearer or reader is to tell this use of the adverbial ablative from that of the adverbial dative, the answer is clear: by the absence of the proclitic pronoun characteristic of the dative (above, §3).

5. A third possible environment, neither adnominal nor adverbial, for the ablative, dative or genitive is with prepositions.

Prepositions such as *pranë* 'beside', *larg* 'far from', *sipas* 'according to', etc. (i.e., those not governing the nominative or the accusative) are said by grammars to govern the ablative (Demiraj 234); either the ablative or the dative (Camaj 1984: 70); both (Camaj 1969: 60). Mann (1932: §81c) has an interesting suggestion that these prepositions govern nouns in the dative and pronouns in the ablative. Dictionaries point either to the one or to the other. Our findings agree on the whole with Boissin's (1975: 205):

5.1 In pronouns of the first and second persons the distinct ablative pronominal endings (*meje* 'me', *teje* 'thee', *nesh* 'us', *jush* 'you') tell us that these prepositions take the ablative, e.g., *sipas jush* 'according to you' (Kadare 1967: 24, line 30) etc.

5.2 In nouns following one of those prepositions, at least in the singular, there is actually no device to tell whether the case is ablative, dative or

¹² On *-ve(t)* see fn. 3.

genitive, because no syntactic case-auxiliaries accompany them.

Plural nouns give us a hint: sometimes they end with the unequivocal indefinite ablative ending *-sh*. This would let us decide that all nouns governed by those prepositions are in the ablative. Yet, as was mentioned before (see n. 3), the ending *-sh* often gives way to the now commoner *-ve*: *pas ca ditësh* ‘after a few days’ (Kadare 1967: 61, line 34), but *pas disa sekondave* (103, line 7), ‘after a few seconds’ (*ca* as well as *disa* are the plural indefinite article); *midis të tjërash* ‘among other things’ (26, line 26), but *midis të tjërave* ‘ditto’ (7, line 15). When the *-ve* ending appears, there is again no way to tell the case. So that apart from instances of *-sh*, the prepositional case in **nouns**, singular and plural, may be treated as a complete neutralization between the three oblique cases.

6. Accordingly, a revised paradigm of the Albanian masculine noun should have the following form:

singular					
		indefinite		definite	
Nominative	}	<i>një gur</i> 'a stone'		<i>guri</i> 'the stone'	
Vocative					
Accusative		<i>një gur</i>		<i>gurin</i>	
Genitive (adnominal)	}	<i>i, e një guri</i> <i>i . . . një guri</i> <i>një guri</i>		neutralized to <i>një guri</i> after preposition (§5.2) or participle (§3.1)	
Dative (adverbal)					
Ablative (adn. & adv.)					
		<i>një guri</i>		<i>gurit</i>	
plural					
		indefinite		definite	
Nominative	}	<i>ca gurë</i>		<i>gurët</i>	
Vocative					
Accusative					
Genitive (ad-nominal)	}	<i>i, e ca gurëve</i> <i>u . . . ca gurëve</i> <i>ca gurëve</i>		neutralized to <i>ca gurëve</i> after preposition (§5.2) or participle (§3.1)	
Dative (adverbal)					
Ablative (adn. & adv.)					
		<i>ca gurëve</i>		<i>gurëve</i>	
		<i>ca gurësh</i>			

Table 2. Syntactic-morphological declension of the indefinite and definite noun.

7. What is the general, methodological lesson to be drawn from the above?

First, that it is unavoidably necessary to analyze the forms of a language in a broad context. We should never assume that we already know how even a part of a language functions, but keep learning anew from contexts.

A second lesson, ultimately based on the first, and perhaps banal by now, is the inseparability of so-called morphology from so-called syntax. We can never predict whether any meaning in any language will be expressed within one word or by more than one.

For nominal cases, this idea has been made abundantly clear. Martinet (1967: §4–20) has insisted that a case ending is not one of the nominal categories clustering around the noun-stem, modifying it, hence **centripetal** to it (singular vs. plural; definite vs. indefinite; diminutive vs. simple, etc.). Rather, a case ending is a ‘syntactic’ device showing the relation of the noun to the larger environment. In this, the case ending is **centrifugal** to the noun as center, i.e., making it dependent on some other part of the sentence. Martinet has remarked that in this sense case and preposition have a parallel function.¹³

When we acknowledge that case endings are centrifugal, relational morphemes, there should be less surprise that they would be part of a syntactic construction: in Albanian they stand in apposition with short personal pronouns (as in the dative) or are marked as adnominal by the proclitic concord pronoun (as in the genitive)—the two case auxiliaries dealt with in this paper.

¹³ Fillmore (1968) apparently had a similar idea when he gathered under **case** all the relationships a noun can entertain with its environment, including traditional **cases**, **prepositions**, certain **adverbs**, etc. The same kind of practical, meaning-minded thinking is to be seen in Albanian grammars that throw the preposition *prej* ‘of, from’ in with the ablative case (above, Table 1 and fn. 2). Yet there is a problem here: Fillmore’s **case** ignores the difference (in some languages) between two or more hierarchical levels of relations of the noun to the morphemes in its environment that define its function:

- a. (traditional) case, as in Alb. *pazar* ‘market (accusative)’;
- b. a preposition, governing an accusative (traditional) case, as in *në pazar* ‘in the market’;
- c. a higher adverbial governing a preposition, which in turn governs the accusative case, as in *gjer në pazar* ‘up to the market, as far as the market’.

The differential functions of (traditional) preposition vs. (traditional) case may also be seen in German *in dem Lande* ‘in the country’ (dative), as against *in das Land* ‘into the country’ (accusative), where the same preposition combined with a different case gives a different meaning.

A description of cases which ignores these and perhaps other hierarchies of function seems deficient.

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